

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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**Beat workfare • Stop cuts
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FOR AUTUMN
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Checkmate in Libya?

By Martyn Hudson

In Tripoli there have been several reports of security tightening and repression stiffening up — obviously in anticipation of a potential uprising in the city as the rebel forces move closer.

Apart from brief and brutally suppressed skirmishes by disaffected youth in some of the poorer suburbs of the capital there has been little activity on this front since mid-February in the week the insurgency began. At that point attacks by civilians on military installations and officers were defeated more by the extremely effective security measures of the regime than by any lack of will of the rebels in the city.

As the rebels move militarily closer there is a hope that this will act as the catalyst for the uprising to reassert itself in the heart of the regime.

Qaddafi, in conversation on Sunday with Kirsan Ilyumzhinov of the International Chess Federation, expressed surprise at what all the fuss was about. "I am not Prime Minister, not President, and not a King. I do not hold any post in Libya, and therefore I have no position I have to step down from". The rebel forces are obviously working with a different narrative from that of the regime.

The physical isolation and potential elimination of the Qaddafi family clique is also the elephant in the room for the US and the UK. They are working towards that — masked by their public pitch of humanitarian intervention to stop attacks on civilians.

The different intervening powers are competing to win favour with the National Transitional Council

in the east and benefit from the post-revolution settlement. Qatar — perhaps the most autocratic of the Gulf monarchies — has been seriously investing in free Libya.

Pictures of the Sheikh of Qatar adorn public buildings in the free zone. This is a measure of things to come, and is part of the nature of this kind of bourgeois revolution.

Worryingly there are also accounts of Free Libyan death squads taking out individuals perceived as government loyalists before they come before any kind of judicial process.

So we stand not for critical support for the NATO intervention (in terms of its consequences), and neither do we stand against it (in terms of the reality on the ground for a people facing massacre at the hands of pro-regime militias).

In a gesture reminiscent of a magical realist novel set in the declining days of the Soviets, Qaddafi has been playing host to the head of the International Chess Federation. The Russian chess master and former Russian provincial governor played chess with the dictator for two hours on Sunday — ironically at the same time as the Russian foreign ministry was making overtures to the National Transitional Council in the east, in preparation for diplomatically recognising it.

Both Russia and China, reading the cards on the table, have wavered and finally stepped back from supporting the loyalist Libyan regime. The Russians are still looking for some form of negotiated settlement but that looks increasingly unlikely.

Top British navy

Above: Nurses in a Misrata hospital. Is Qaddafi's regime about to fall?

grandee Mark Stanhope has raised doubts about the finances of the NATO intervention, which has now been extended a further 90 days until the end of September, but the rebel forces have been making serious advances.

The uprising is about to take Zlitan, only 60 miles away from Tripoli. It has broken out of Misrata which is now making some moves back to normal life after being threatened with the slaughter of its population of half a million.

On Friday 10 June, the government forces fought back but were repelled and the initiative is clearly in the hands of the rebels. The old monarchist Tricolour is flying across western as well as eastern Libya now.

Zawiya, where a people's uprising was brutally suppressed and its mosque razed to the ground by the regime, looks as if it is now in rebel hands. The rebellion amongst the Berbers in the Nafusa mountains south of Tripoli is continuing — again with great successes for the rebels on the Tunisian border.

Sahba in the Saharan south has just been taken by a people's uprising. That was the gateway to Niger and Chad and a po-

tential escape route for the Qaddafi clan into exile with one of its client regimes in Africa — regimes which were at the receiving end of the regime's oil millions over the last 20 years and which provided some of the personnel for the mercenary forces used so brutally to crush the uprising in the early days of the civil war.

If the Free Libyan militias find a hostile population rather than a popular uprising in the cities that they liberate, then there could be an intensification of a revengeful death squad policy like that beginning to operate in the east.

Only with the rapid development of civil society and the reassertion of the democratic will of the Libyan working people can that revenge, understandable in its fury, be mitigated.

In any case, this is the moment of downfall for dictators. We can look forward one day, to see the red flags replacing the Tricolour, as the Tricolour replaced the green flags of this vile dictatorship. Red flags are already being seen in Egypt and have already been unfurled in the recent abortive revolution in Iran.

This checkmate is a step forward to that day.

Is Syria's army cracking?

The Syrian army is "cracking" under the pressure of the in-domitatable rebellion in the country, which continues despite over a thousand deaths and an estimated ten thousand people jailed.

Or so Hugh Macleod and Annasofie Flamand estimate (*Al Jazeera*, 11 June). They cite reports from people who have fled over the border to Turkey, including defecting soldiers.

Joshua Landis, a US academic expert on Syria, is sceptical. "There is little evidence of wide-scale mutiny of Syrian soldiers.

No solid evidence that they shot at each other... Individual soldiers do seem to have deserted. Some turned up in Turkey. They seem to have been instructed to exaggerate the defections..."

The rebellion remains hindered by the Assad dictatorship's effective block on international news reporting, the lack of any clear political programme for the opposition beyond a call for democracy and Assad to go, and the almost-impossibility of generating forums for discussing further political ideas.

As the German weekly

Die Zeit puts it in a round-up article:

"When would the revolution have won? When Assad goes? When he, his brother Maher, chief of the Republican Guard, and his cousin Rami Makhlouf, who dominates the Syrian economy, go? When Article 8 of the Syrian constitution is removed, which guarantees the supremacy of the Ba'th party?"

An Israeli MP has said that members of the Syrian opposition have asked him for Israeli aid, and one Syrian exile opposition group, the "Reform Party" based in the USA, has said that Israel should

hold on to the Golan Heights. Probably these reports are puffing up attitudes held by isolated individuals, or just invented, but who knows?

An article in the *Asia Times* (13 June) highlights the world power-politics dimensions of the Syrian crisis. Russia fears it will lose its only Mediterranean naval base, at Tartus, in Syria, and become more vulnerable to US military pressure.

Iran, Assad's closest ally, and the Hezbollah movement, powerful in Lebanon, also stand to lose heavily if the dictatorship falls.

Patrick Rolfe, 1987-2011

By Edward Maltby

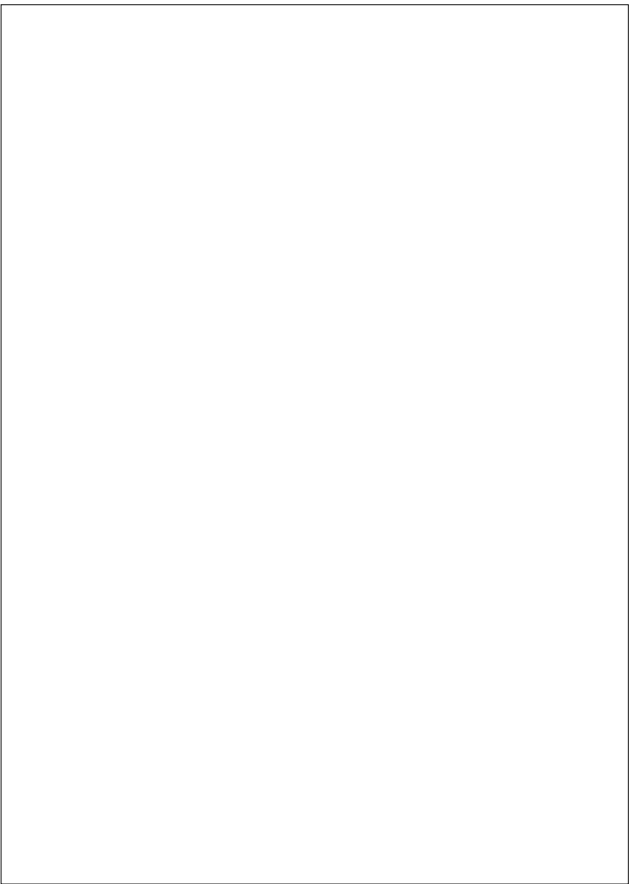
It is with great sadness that we inform readers of Solidarity that our comrade Patrick Rolfe has died at the age of 24.

He passed away on the evening of 10 June, following a long battle with a rare form of stomach cancer. Although he had been ill for some months, his death was unexpected and has come as a shock.

Patrick Rolfe joined Workers’ Liberty in 2008 as a student at Cambridge University. Although he was new to revolutionary politics, he immediately threw himself into building a student campaign against the marketisation of education and higher fees. In 2009 he organised an action for the Education Not for Sale campaign where activists infiltrated a conference by the university bosses’ organisation Universities UK and shut it down.

After graduating from Cambridge, Patrick went to the Isle of Wight as one of a team of three young Workers’ Liberty comrades who sparked the struggle to save the Vestas wind turbine factory. Management had cracked down on attempts by workers to unionise the factory, and were planning to close it down. They expected little resistance; and many workers were convinced that they were powerless to stop the closure.

Camping outside the factory, with little time and few resources, Patrick and his comrades launched a



campaign of agitation among workers and the local labour movement, which culminated in workers forming a committee inside the factory and staging an occupation of the plant.

Throughout this struggle and afterward, Patrick did more than organise – he wrote about the ideas of Marxist ecology, fleshing out a class-struggle approach to fighting climate change.

After the Vestas struggle, Patrick undertook a master’s degree in environmental policy at Sussex

University. There he helped build the Defend Sussex campaign, which launched a series of occupations against the management’s business plan to radically reform the University and sack over 100 staff. Patrick was victimised, as one of the “Sussex Six” he was suspended from his course.

The victimisation never fazed Patrick, and he and his comrades launched a national campaign for reinstatement, and won. At the same time, Patrick was organising the southern region of the National

Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, bringing activists from across the south coast to co-ordinating meetings.

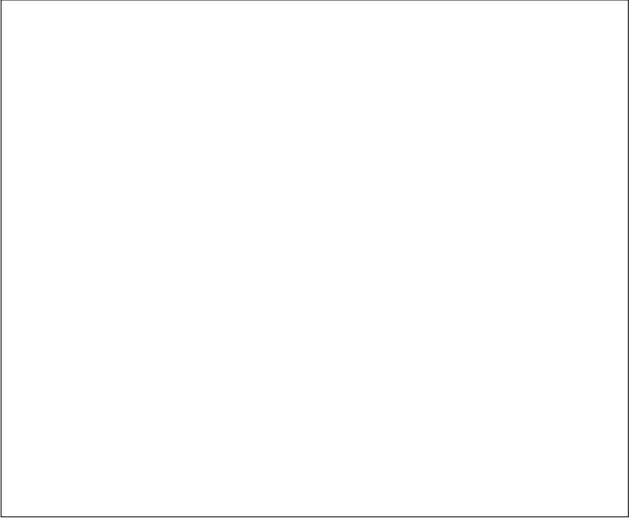
Later on, Patrick developed disagreements with Workers’ Liberty, but he never dropped out of political activity. During the student movement of winter 2010, Patrick was organising protests with us at Leeds University.

Patrick will be fondly remembered by those who met him and who worked alongside him in the many campaigns he animated and took part in. He had a cool, rational approach and could be relied upon to work calmly and methodically, no matter what pressure he was under. He had a sharp, often dark sense of humour and a warm manner that endeared him to those who knew him.

For me the most impressive thing about Pat was his determination to always reason things through and pursue the truth, by his own lights. He never, ever ran away from his ideas. He was unafraid of the conclusions he drew.

His political commitment never wavered, and he was writing articles, discussing politics with friends and planning campaigns from his hospital bed until the end.

- The next issue of *Solidarity* will carry a fuller commemoration of Patrick’s life and political activism. We invite comrades to write in with their memories of Patrick.



Feminism: back by popular demand!

By Esther Townsend

After weeks of debate and some controversy about the politics of Slutwalk, the London march on 11 June was positive and full of a feeling of solidarity.

The crowd of 5,000, marching through London shouting “Whatever we wear, wherever we go; yes means yes and no means no!”, was diverse: people of all sexualities, women and men and transgender, not overwhelmingly white (which had been a particular concern). It was, however, mainly a demonstration of youth.

In contrast to movements like Reclaim the Night, the march not only “allowed in” but actively invited men, transgender people and sex workers’ organisations.

We spoke to Irish sex worker-led campaign Turn Off The Blue Light who said the Slutwalk organisers had called and asked them to come to London — “We would like to thank Slutwalk London... all too often sex workers are excluded in society”.

Speakers at the end of the march included representatives from Black Women’s Rape Action Project, Gender Action for Peace and Security and the English Collective of Prostitutes. They received a good reception from the crowd when they advocated complete decriminalisation of sex work.

Workers’ Liberty activists stood in solidarity with the message that that rape is about power not sex: we need to challenge the routine placing of sexual violence alongside the diversionary and offensive idea that men “just can’t resist” a woman in a short skirt.

With others from anti-cuts groups including the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts Women, Westminster University Women and Royal Holloway Feminist Society, we also highlighted that we need campaigns to defend

and extend women’s services, sex education and the social provision to make liberation a reality. Our placards read “stop shutting safe havens for women and children” and “no women’s liberation without socialism, no socialism without women’s liberation”.

The left was there too. The Counterfire-organised “Hoodies, Hijabs and Hotpants” bloc didn’t seem that visible, although we saw one woman marching in a burkha. The SWP had gone for a not very political “No means no, Clarke must go!”

However, the majority of banners and placards were homemade. Organised by university undergraduates and college students, Slutwalk motivated many younger women to get involved — new to activism and feminism but eager to make their voices heard and declare their right to dress and behave how they like without being attacked or blamed.

Politically Slutwalk remains broad and difficult to define. This could be a good thing but it also needs continued discussion. The feminist activist group Feminist Fightback (www.feministfightback.org.uk) distributed a leaflet on the day highlighting a key debating point — how do we move on from “subverting” “slut” to a fuller anti-capitalist feminist politics about violence against women.

Organisers in Toronto have already begun to plan another march for next year and London organisers are establishing a “Slut means speak up” campaign around various issues. Their first action is a petition on the fact that 90% of rapes go unreported, and only 6.7% of those reported result in conviction.

What will Slutwalk become? Where will it go from here? We don’t know, but a 5,000 strong march is a good starting place: as one placard put it, “feminism: back by popular demand!”.

Southern Cross: it’s political

By Sacha Ismail

The future for 31,000 elderly and frail people whose welfare is in the hands of the ailing Southern Cross care homes company remains uncertain.

The company has withheld 30% of rent due to the landlords that now own its 750 homes. It has also said 3,000 jobs will be cut.

The company is saying homes will close — but are, for now, playing down the number of homes that will close. They know that closure will mean certain death and devastating health problems for many elderly people.

The landlords, being landlords, don’t like not getting their rent and are demanding the government “shares the pain” and steps in to bail out Southern Cross bosses and shareholders.

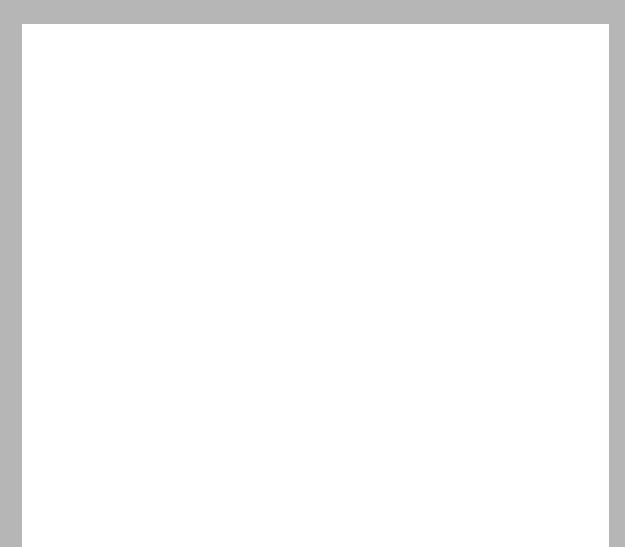
We say government

should step in, but to expropriate Southern Cross and all private care homes with no compensation for the profiteers!

Job cuts in these homes will certainly mean a declining standard of care for residents. Already 25% of Southern Cross homes have been assessed as “below standard”. And required standards of care in care homes were, under rules introduced by New Labour, set very low.

A GMB organiser in Southern Cross told us: “I think an effective fight can’t just be about individual homes or just about defending jobs. It has to tie into the broader issue of care being privatised and run — run down — for a profit.

The union should be making political arguments, like for the nationalisation of Southern Cross. But at the moment that’s not happening”.



Following the Syntagma Square protest camp’s call for a blockade of the Greek Parliament on Wednesday 8 June, Real Democracy activists in Britain demonstrated in solidarity. The camp called the blockade as part of action around a general strike, called by the Greek unions GSEE and Adedy. The strike and protest are in opposition to a vote on the selling off of publicly owned sectors of industry and public sector cuts.

Pay frozen, offices closed, now pensions cut

My Life at Work

Theydon Boyce is a benefits worker in East London

Tell us about the work you do.
I work in a east London processing centre that administers claims for Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Employment Support Allowance

Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?
Definitely not. Some long serving colleagues have not had a consolidated pay rise for five years now. Low pay is endemic. 63% of civil servants earn less than £25,000 a year. The starting salary in my office is £17,650, barely above the London Living Wage. The sickness absence policy is particularly harsh, with many members receiving warnings even though they have disabilities or are genuinely ill. Management are currently preparing a drive on “performance”

through the use of ever-increasing “benchmarks” (the amount of work you are supposed to carry out in a day). Failure to meet these benchmarks will result in warning letters and eventually dismissal.

How has the recent economic and political situation, affected your work?
We have had our pay frozen, our redundancy scheme ripped up, offices closed, colleagues have been made redundant and now our pensions are being robbed. This is our “contribution” to the reducing the budget deficit.

What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to “talk politics on the job”?
The sort of things most workers in most workplaces talk about — what was on TV last night, football, music etc. But given the nature of our employment it is very easy to talk politics and the class nature of the attacks we face.

The government has attacked benefits workers and claimants in different ways; how do workers see their relationship with claimants?
We’ll be lucky if we get half the staff here out on strike on 30 June. Some won’t even stand up for themselves, let alone claimants. But our branch has made some positive links with the Hackney Unemployed Workers group. We have been making the point in union meetings about how the attack on our conditions goes hand in hand with the attack on benefits.

What are your bosses like? Is there a problem with bullying and harassment by bosses?
Across the Department of Work and Pensions there is a huge problem with harassment from the bosses, but in the office where I work not so much. On the whole the managers treat the staff with some dignity, despite some notable exceptions.

Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job?
Yes. Our union is PCS. They do quite a good job locally, holding regular meetings, representing members in grievances and disciplinaries. Quite a few people are not in the union, though.
One problem is that we have a lot of strikes, usually one or two days, over issues like pay and job losses. Following each strike there are usually months of inactivity with hardly any information coming out to members about negotiations and how they can have a say over the direction of the dispute.

If you could change one thing about your work, what would it be?
Improve the pay!

For more interviews in the My Life At Work series, see <http://tinyurl.com/mylifeatwork>

Letters



Blairites target Ed Miliband

A diehard-Blairite plot to oust Ed Miliband as Labour leader seems to be underway, with the help of the media.
Miliband has been weak; and that may tempt disillusioned socialists in Labour and the unions to join the chorus for Ed Miliband to go. That would mean lining up with a diehard-Blairite coup.
The biggest problem with Ed Miliband is that, since he was elected as the unions’ favoured candidate against the wishes of the Shadow Cabinet and Labour MPs, he has been under very little pressure from the unions or the left of the party.
He was always going to be weak; the lack of pressure from the left means that the hard-Blairite right have been able to push him.
The current “Refounding Labour” review has become the usual bureaucratic box ticking exercise. It provided the Labour left with an opening to argue for Labour to be a genuine working class party. The decrepitude and entropy of the Labour left means the opportunity is fast being squandered.
Socialists should be battling in the unions, in Labour Party branches, and in Young Labour to make Labour fight the cuts. Working class voters will only be won back to Labour if appears to represent their interests and not those of the rich.

Dave Kirk, Leeds

Socialist Party: hot air on pensions

In his attack on the AWL (see www.workersliberty.org/libya) Peter Taaffe says, “the successful experiences of the [civil service union] PCS in a series of industrial struggles, including in the pensions battle of 2005, which along with other ultra-lefts the AWL heavily criticised at the time.”
Before the 2005 pensions deal agreed by PCS, people joining the civil service had the right to retire at 60. People joining after it now have to work to 65 to get the same pension. How is that not a step backwards? Why is it “ultra-left” to criticise such a deal?
I assume the “successful” element of the deal Taaffe is referring to is the Socialist Party’s loudly heralded but totally false claim in 2005 that they had secured for all civil servants already in the job the right to retire at 60. That promise lasted only as long as the minister who made it. It had no

legal or contractual basis and is now being ripped up by this government.
The SP cannot claim that they did not realise the implications of the 2005 pensions deal. That there was no cast iron guarantee of retirement at 60 and the foolishness of an industrial strategy that created a two-tier workforce, in which those with preserved rights could over time only become an increasingly small minority, was repeatedly pointed out to them at the time by myself and other PCS reps.

Matthew Thompson, Manchester

A closed-off culture

The recent Workers’ Liberty supplement *Libya, anti-imperialism, and the Socialist Party (Solidarity 3-206)* was a really interesting catch-up for me about the history of a group I was part of in the early 80s.
I will never deny the valuable and inspiring part that comrades like Peter Taaffe played in teaching me about revolutionary thinking and organisation. I was particularly impressed by the genuine working-class make-up of the tendency and its orientation of young ex-student comrades like myself to get out and “learn from workers”. But I can now recognise the truth of a lot of what you are saying.
Back then, I tried to train my mind to conform to what seemed like correct thinking coming from “the centre”, as there wasn’t really any room for holding different views.
The older experienced comrades obviously knew more about Marxism than me. Dissent on any issue was a cause for “discussion”, but only ever, as I eventually realised, to bring the comrade to the correct line.
We often existed in a state of double-think, particularly in relation to internal democracy and to the way we worked with our contacts. It seems to me now that this is a common hazard for all “sects” — it is a problem arising from secrecy combined with democratic centralism. Probably, as you say, it is a symptom of “bureaucratism”. Ultimately it is not the best way to develop revolutionary cadres or ensure that we get our policies right. It leads to the domination of a handful of brains, with all their particular rigid habits and prejudices, over thousands of others, who have not learned how to make independent Marxist analysis.
There needs to be genuine openness to free discussion, based on the understanding that we may learn something new and important from it, rather than a pretence at discussion which is aimed at “bringing the comrades round to our position”.
We join the first group we meet that is in step with our revolutionary urges. The scales fall from our eyes. We see the world described as it truly is, and learn that sometimes the reality is different to what we have been taught to think, or even counter-intuitive. We are open to identifying loyally with the “true Marxism” of our leadership and pretty much absorbing every argument we are fed. Every other group has got it wrong and we can explain why, as long as we’ve got this week’s paper to hand. It’s not attractive, and it’s often comical.
Eventually we get either burned-out, disillusioned or bored. If we are very lucky our comrades have given us enough tools to keep developing our thinking in a way that

is useful to the working-class. Again, the only way is to keep finding a flexible balance between the historic experience represented by older leading comrades and the questioning creative attitude of young people. With hindsight I don’t think Militant comrades were able to do that. It’s interesting that while in Militant I knew nothing about the history presented in WL.
I suspect that similar lapses of memory, rigidities of thought, and cults of leadership occur in most revolutionary groups, and I am interested how we can try and take that into account in the ways we organise.

Theo, writing on the AWL website

How the other brother lives

Jon Lansman

David Miliband’s earnings from outside parliament this year now exceed £200,000.
These earnings include: £25,000 for a lecture in Abu Dhabi; £42,600 for three lectures through the London Speaker Bureau and £10,000 for another organised by McKinsey; almost £24,000 for one week’s teaching at MIT plus the same again for his whole family’s flights and accommodation; £75,000 for 12-15 days work as a director of Sunderland Football Club.
Nice work if you can get it. All on top of his MP’s salary, of course.
• <http://www.leftfutures.org>

30 June and after: rank-and-file must control



Members of the teachers’ union NUT voted 92% for discontinuous strikes to save pension provision, on a 40% turnout. Members of ATL, another teachers’ union, voted 83% in favour on a turnout of 35%. On 15 June the civil service union PCS declares the outcome of its voting.

The three unions, plus, in further education colleges and newer universities, the lecturers’ union, UCU, which has already balloted, will start by striking together on 30 June.

On 22 June the local government and health union Unison, at its conference, is likely to vote to ballot, too, paving the way for a bigger joint strike in the autumn. Leaders of the general unions Unite and GMB have said that their members in the public sector will join action in the autumn.

In the next two weeks, trade unionists across the country are getting ready for 30 June. Preparations in Nottinghamshire are different from in most parts of the country.

The trades council, the anti-cuts committee, and a joint committee of the striking unions are planning to use the day for strikers to formulate and debate proposals for the way forward.

On the 30th, a march through Nottingham will finish not with a rally where workers hear union leaders and then go home, but with a mass meeting at the city’s Albert Hall. The capacity is almost a thousand, and the organisers are confident of filling it. The trades council and the joint strike committee have agreed a draft motion on action after 30 June, and the meeting will be open to other motions and amendments.

The Government’s pension plans mean higher contributions (three per cent more off the average worker’s pay), later retirement dates, and lower pensions, across the board in the public sector. Those changes are linked to cuts in state pension provision, and will tend to ratchet down pension provision in the private sector, too.

The movement against those plans has the potential also to push back the cuts in services, jobs, and pension provision. With the Government’s drive already in full swing to cut benefits for the disabled, and its announcement in mid-June of its plans for “workfare” — in short: simultaneously cutting jobs and trying to coerce the unemployed into taking

non-existent or very poor jobs or else lose benefit — it becomes urgent that the unions defend welfare benefits too.

To make reality of the movement’s potential, it has to come under the control of the rank and file. Workers have to be more than a stage army paraded from time to time by the union leaders to strengthen their hand in negotiations. The rank and file must be able to discuss the tactics, the demands, and the political perspective of the movement.

Action has to extend beyond important, but widely-spaced, one-day strikes. The Southampton council workers now in dispute over cuts have shown how. Instead of a series of one-day protests, they have organised indefinite rolling selective action: a different section of workers out each week, supported with strike pay, and chosen to maximise the economic impact on the employer.

Teachers could follow the example of teachers in Victoria, Australia, in their successful dispute in 2008. They did not proceed by organising a one-day protest, then waiting for the union leaders to organise another, and so on. They organised a rolling programme of regional strikes, each one linked to big demonstrations at the offices of local MPs.

That Nottingham’s unions are organising a meeting where workers can debate the way forward is in part because of the influence of Workers’ Liberty members in the local labour movement. Others on the left, notably the SWP, have opposed the plan in favour of a “Day of Rage” with no chance for discussion. Their argument is that a meeting will be boring “old left” stuff, that striking workers won’t want or even won’t be able to discuss politics and strategy, and that detail is best left to the established officials and activists.

The SWP is holding meetings across the country in the run-up to 30 June under the banner “Unite the Resistance”. It is positive that they have invited speakers from the Coalition of Resistance and the Socialist Party’s National Shop Stewards Network initiative. On the record, however, they will be averse to sober debate.

Even if you can’t get your local movement to organise like Nottingham for 30 June, discuss the issues and the motion in your union branch, trades council and anti-cuts committee.

Miliband moans about the rich, bashes the poor

The “gay girl blogger” in Damascus was really a male student in Edinburgh. Labour movement activists must be wondering whether the “leader of the Labour Party” is really some dimwitted Blairite apparatchik.

As the Tories launch their Workfare scheme and their slightly-modified NHS marketisation plans, Ed Miliband made a speech on 12 June... pillorying people on incapacity benefit for not getting jobs, and recommending local authorities allocate council housing not by need but by whether tenants have jobs or do voluntary work.

He also said, rightly, that:

- New Labour “saw responsibility as only applying to those on benefits... That meant the responsibilities of others were ignored — the business executives, the bankers, the Chief Executives”.
- Even after the financial crisis, “the Confederation of British Industry, the Financial Services Authority and even the Governor of the Bank of England sounded more willing to speak out on top pay than [New Labour] did”.
- “We cannot lecture people on benefits about responsibility if we do not also address the problem at the top”.
- The Government is not “ensuring there is the work available for people who are responsible”.

But all he proposed to tackle “the problem at the top” was that companies should publish the ratio of the pay of their top earner to that of their average earner. Since we already know, and Ed Miliband mentioned it, that “just in the last 10 years, the pay of someone at the top of a company has gone from 69 times the average wage to 145 times”, there is no reason to suppose that just publishing will reduce inequality.

Miliband anxiously assured “entrepreneurs and business people who generate wealth” that he “applauded” them getting rich.

He ruled out higher taxes on the rich by saying that “back in the 1970s, very high rates of taxation put people off creating greater wealth”. (In fact, the high tax rates then on top pay dated back to 1945, and had gone together with three decades of unprecedented economic growth and relatively restrained inequality in Britain).

Miliband proposed harsh and decisive measures only for the “problem at the bottom”. In fact, the New Labour government already started a drive to throw people off incapacity benefit, which the coalition government is continuing with extra zeal.

Oddly, Miliband cited as his example of an “irresponsible” person at the “bottom” of society, the counterpart of Fred Goodwin at the “top”, the other side of the vice of irresponsibility supposedly squeezing the “middle”, an unnamed man he had met in local-election campaigning who had been on incapacity benefit for a decade.

The man’s injuries, suffered at work, were real. He was “a good man who cared for his children”. Only Ed Miliband, from meeting the man casually, just knew that “there were other jobs he could do”, and presumably had failed to take from sheer idleness.

2.46 million jobless, even on underestimated official figures; the Government slashing jobs daily; the Government continuing New Labour’s cuts in jobs at Remploy, the firm set up specially to organise jobs for disabled people; and Ed Miliband somehow knows, straight off, that this “good man” is really malingering?

The twist to the Ed Miliband story is the Labour’s hardline-Blairites, while pushing him to make this sort of brainless speech, are also pushing to oust him and replace him by one of their own, who will make such speeches with more zest and fewer tiresome grumblings about the rich.

The left and the unions should start organising pressure on Ed Miliband to stand up for the non-New-Labour approach he promised when contesting for the party leadership. That is also the best way to counter the pressure for a hardline-Blairite coup against him.



Notts Trades Council/Joint Strike Committee motion for 30 June

We the assembled union members of PCS, NUT, ATL and UCU congratulate the union executives for balloting for industrial action over pensions. Today must be seen as only the beginning of an ongoing campaign of action.

We urge our union leaderships to announce plans to escalate the industrial action over pensions. It is clear from recent announcements by the government that they are not yet close to withdrawing their pension proposals. Evidence for local campaigning across the country shows that members understand the issues involved in the pensions disputes and are prepared to take extensive industrial action to defeat the government’s pensions proposals.

We therefore call on our respective National Executive Committees in consultation with local union organisations to draw up plans for a variety of further actions under the current ballots beginning with:

- At least one further national strike day before the end July 2011.
- A timetable for further strikes in the Autumn, both nationally and regionally based.

We further call on our National Executives to start urgent talks with other unions facing job cuts and attacks on pay, pensions and conditions but who have so far not balloted for action. In such talks the Unions should make the case for our sister unions balloting for strike action against these attacks as a matter of urgency.

Finally, we believe it is vital that rank and file union members are involved in this dispute and we call on the unions taking action today to establish strike committees both within and between unions.

- Contact Notts Trades Council
william.conway@ntlworld.com

The way to win

This year marks the centenary of the “Great Unrest”, the years of industrial struggle which opened up before the First World War. The movement was influenced by ideas of industrial unionism and revolutionary syndicalism. In Britain the movement is closely associated with the activities of Tom Mann, who wrote the article *The Way to Win* in 1909.

Tom Mann’s long political life (born in 1856, he lived for 85 years) spanned many experiences. He was a founding member of the first “Marxist” socialist group in Britain — the Social Democratic Federation. At the time of his death he was a member of the — Stalinised — British Communist Party.

Mann was a human link between the organisation of “new unions” of unskilled workers in the late 1880s and 1890s and the strike wave of 1910-14.

He was centrally involved in agitating for and guiding the militants of both periods.

From 1902-10 Mann was living (and organising) in New Zealand and (for most of that time) Australia. Based mainly in Melbourne, he was first an organiser for the Victorian Labor Party and then the Victorian Socialist Party. He was asked by groups of workers — sheepshearers, miners, others — to help them organise.

On 1 January 1909 miners in Broken Hill were locked out over a dispute over wage cuts. The union took the employers to an official Arbitration Court. But the case took months to come to court and the miners remained locked-out. The court eventually ruled in favour of the union but its ruling was unenforceable. The miners stayed locked out.

Meanwhile, in a linked dispute at a smelting works in Port Pirie, the police were called in to protect scab labour. The police had the support of the Liberal-Labor coalition federal government.

Both disputes ended in bitter defeats.

Mann outlined his conclusions in the *The Way to Win*, published as a pamphlet in 1909. It is an important document of the “industrial unionism” of the time, though as he wrote it Mann did not see it as part of a “new wave”.

But soon after Mann had published *The Way to Win* he got hold of other pamphlets which he found very similar to his own viewpoint — *Socialism Made Easy, the Industrial and Political Unity of Labour* by James Connolly was one. This was a spur for Mann to make bigger initiatives.

Mann returned to England in 1910, briefly rejoining the Social Democratic Federation and setting up the Industrial Syndicalist League. For the next four years he was involved with many disputes: the 1910 Cambrian Combine Dispute, the 1911 Liverpool Transport Workers Strike, the 1913 Black Country strikes for a minimum wage.

The Way to Win covers themes that Mann returned to again and again such as the need for workers to develop “self respect” and working-class consciousness. He was not afraid of “preaching” this message even when faced with hostile, “apolitical” meetings of workers. Here, as he had done twenty years previously, he describes unions as “training grounds” for building solidarity and creating stronger class consciousness.

It is said that Mann rejects broad workers’ party political organisation in this article, but that is not an accurate interpretation. Mann did not reject the political organisation of workers as such, but he saw as inadequate the union-based but politically bourgeois-liberal Australian Labor Party. Founded in 1891, it had already governed briefly in 1904, when it helped bring in a comprehensive system of arbitration of industrial disputes, mentioned in the pamphlet. It was in government again, 1908-9, as Mann wrote. These were the first “labour” governments in the world outside the Paris Commune and Queensland in 1899 — and obviously

very different from the Commune.

Mann advocated workers vote for Labor where its candidates fought the class struggle. He also continued to believe socialists should stand in elections. But his focus had shifted away from Parliamentary political action. He did not think workers should rely on Parliamentary change.

Mann’s simple message was effective propaganda. In the heavily bureaucratised union movement of today the themes he presents are still highly relevant.

Cathy Nugent

The great crisis is drawing nigh when the supreme effort must be made by the workers to take entire responsibility for the management of all industry and commerce; the existing system of society must out of necessity give place to some other system that will adequately provide for the requirements of all.

The nature of the newer order will depend in considerable measure on the standard of intelligence possessed by the workers, and on their courage to apply sound principles that will ensure social and economic equality.

The object I have in writing this ... is not to enlarge upon principles or ideals, but to direct attention to the machinery that is necessary to enable us to achieve our project.

The preliminary essential condition is working class solidarity.

Without this solidarity, i.e., without the power and the disposition to act in concert as the working-class against the dominating plutocratic class, there is no hope.

At present we have not got this solidarity, either industrially or politically.

The weakness of our industrial organisation lies less in the fact that only one fourth of the workers are organised, than in the much more serious fact that those who are organised

From Tunis to London, the workers’ agenda

Ideas for Freedom is the annual weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers’ Liberty. IFF 2011 takes place on 8-10 July at Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, London N19 5DQ.

**For a timetable, more details and to book tickets online see www.workersliberty.org/ideas
Email awl@workersliberty.org, or ring 07796 690 874**



Friday 8 July 7pm-11pm

Showing and discussion of Eisenstein’s film *Strike* with screenwriter Clive Bradley and Janine Booth.
@ the Exmouth Arms, 1 Starcross Street, London NW1 2HR

Sessions on Saturday 9 July include:

- Eyewitness report from Benghazi by Libyan activist Huda Abuzeid
- The fight for a workers’ government, with Sean Matgamna and Jill Mountford
- Chavs: the demonisation of the working class, with Owen Jones and hip-hop artist The Ruby Kid, aka Daniel Randall
- Is anti-semitism marginal? with Robert Fine, Warwick University and Eric Lee of labourstart.org
- The working class in the North African and Middle Eastern revolutions, with speakers from Morocco, Tunisia and Iraq

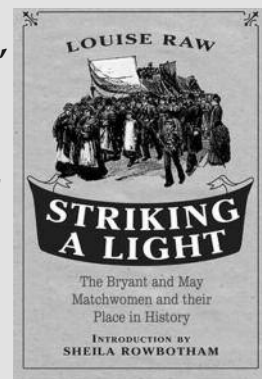


Robert Fine

- Introduction to Marxism sessions including Paul Hampton on “Who was Lenin?” and Camila Bassi on “Are socialists multiculturalists?”
- Marxism and anarchism. Martin Thomas of the AWL debates Iain McKay of Anarchist FAQ.
- Race, class and sexuality on film: showing of *Pictures of Zain* and *What You Looking At?*, and talk led by director Faryal Velmi

Sessions on Sunday 10 July include

- Should we be saying “General strike now”? Elaine Jones, vice-president of Wirral TUC, debates Richard Brenner of Workers’ Power
- Introduction to Marxism: “Liberal, radical and socialist feminisms”, with Rosie Woods, Esther Townsend and Jade Baker
- Why we do not denounce NATO intervention in Libya
- School students’ struggles in 2003 and 2010
- How can Labour councillors fight cuts? Poplar, the GLC and today, with Janine Booth, John McDonnell MP and anti-cuts Labour councillors
- The 1880s and 90s: Marxists and the rise of “New Unionism”, with Louise Raw, author of *Striking a Light*, on the 1888 matchworkers’ strike.
- The Eurozone crisis and workers’ struggle across Europe, with John Grahl, Middlesex University.



Tickets bought before the end of June are £20 waged, £12 low-waged/students, £7 unwaged/school students (one day £11, £7, £5).



The 1909 Broken Hill lockout is a key turning point in the history of the Australian labour movement. It also pointed the way to new trends in socialist thinking.

are not prepared to make common cause with each other.

Hitherto we have been content with trade unions — meaning unions of skilled workers, supplemented by unions of unskilled workers. But each of these unions has for the most part initiated and as far as possible carried out a policy for itself alone; more recently broadened somewhat by joining Trade and Labour Federations to secure something in the nature of general help in time of trouble or warfare.

Still, the basis of unionism to-day is distinctly sectional and narrow, instead of cosmopolitan and broad-based.

In Australia, more particularly, resort to Arbitration Courts and Wages Boards for settlement of industrial disputes has resulted in settlements being arrived at and agreements entered into by various unions, binding them not to become actively engaged in any dispute during the period covered by the agreement.

Such agreements in themselves absolutely destroy the possibility of class solidarity.

Agreements entered into between unions and employers directly — i.e., without the intervention of Arbitration Courts or Wages Boards — are equally detrimental to, and in dead opposition to working-class solidarity. They, therefore, must be classed as amongst the chief obstructive agencies to general working-class progress.

Thus it is clear that to continue entering into binding agreements with employers is to render the unionist movement impotent for achieving our economic freedom.

Therefore, no more agreements must be entered into for lengthy periods. Of course, temporary adjustments must be made, but they must be for the hour only, leaving the workers free for concerted action with their fellows.

FORM

The form of capitalist industry has changed during the past 50 years. It has passed through the stages of individual ownership of shop or factory, the employer taking part in the business and competing with all other employers in the same business, then to limited liability and joint stock companies, which removed the individual employer — and reduced competition between the capitalist firms.

From this it has now gone to trusts and combines, interstate, and even international in their operation.

A corresponding change must take place with the workers’ organisation. Sectionalism must disappear, and the industrial organisations must be equal to state, national, and international action, not in theory only, but in actual fact.

Another influence tending strongly towards discord and not towards solidarity, is the stipulating in some unions that a man who joins an industrial organisation by that act pledges himself to vote a certain way politically.

I have, in days gone by, argued strongly that the industrial organisations should be the special places where economic knowledge should be imparted and adequate scope for discussion afforded. I hold so still, but I am thoroughly satisfied that it is a source of serious discord to couple the political with the industrial in the sense of demanding that a man must vote as the industrial organisation declares.

It is not difficult to understand why this should be so. It is because in the unions or industrial organisations we are (or should be) prepared to enrol every person who works, irrespective of his or her intelligence, or opinions held upon political or other subjects.

Take the case of an organiser, who finds himself at the centre of an industry where there is practically no organisation. He soon discovers that the usual orthodox bodies are there, theological and political. He finds out the composition of the local governing bodies and the type of politician who received the votes at last election. From this he concludes that there are resident there the usual percentage of reactionaries, Liberals, Laborites, and Socialists, and each of these parties finds its adherents chiefly in the ranks of the workers.

That ought not to interfere with industrial organisation, in which they should all be enrolled entirely irrespective of political faith; and becoming members of the industrial body, it is here these workers should get their education in industrial and social economics, and this would prove the true guide to political action.

To insist upon them voting solidly politically before they have received instruction in matters economic, is to add to the difficulties of organisation.

Notwithstanding what has been done and is now being done by the Australian Workers’ Union, it is abundantly clear that we shall have to separate the industrial from the political, and so afford scope for growing activities with the least amount of friction.

I am not wishful to deprecate political action, but it is necessary to say that during recent years, in Australia, undue importance has been attached to political action; and although the actual membership of industrial organisations may be as large, or even larger than in former years, there is not held by the typical unionist a proper understanding of the fundamental and vital importance of economic or industrial organisation. Indeed, to listen to the speeches of the typical Labor politician it is clear that he is surfeited with the idea that that which is of paramount importance is the return to the legislative bodies of an additional number of Labor men, and that all else is secondary and relatively trifling.

In absolute fact, the very opposite is the case. Experience in all countries shows most conclusively that industrial organisation, intelligently conducted, is of much more moment than political action, for entirely irrespective as to which school of politicians is in power, capable and courageous in-

dustrial activity forces from the politicians proportionate concessions.

It is an entirely mistaken notion to suppose that the return of Labor men or Socialists to Parliament can bring about deep-seated economic changes, unless the people themselves intelligently desire these changes, and those who do so desire know the value of economic organisation. During the past few years the representative men of France, Germany, Italy, and other countries have urged upon the workers of the world to give increased attention to industrial organisation, and they are acting accordingly.

Indeed, it is obvious that a growing proportion of the intelligent pioneers of economic changes are expressing more and more dissatisfaction with Parliament and all its works, and look forward to the time when Parliaments, as we know them, will be superseded by the people managing their own affairs by means of the Initiative and the Referendum.

However, I am not an anti-Parliamentarian. I am chiefly concerned that we should attend to the first job in the right order, and thus make it easier to do whatever else may be necessary.

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

It is encouraging to see the practical turn in affairs in Port Pirie. There the Combined Unions’ Committee has already sent out a circular letter to the unions of South Australia, in which they say:

“During the present struggle with the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, we have had ample opportunity of ascertaining in what manner industrial organisation might be made more effective in resisting the tyrannical encroachments or modern capitalism, and securing to the worker a larger share of the product of his labour. My committee have come to a definite and unanimous conclusion that craft unionism has outlived its usefulness, and that 20th century industrial development demands on the part of the workers a more perfect system of organisation. With this end in view we urge, as a preliminary step, the holding of a Trades’ Union Congress in Adelaide during the month of July next. We sincerely hope that this proposition will meet with the earnest and energetic support of your members, and that immediate action will be taken.”

This is a significant sign of the times, and an encouraging one, too, to those who lament the sectionalism of the present unionism movement...

If the unions of the Barrier agree to take such action as suggested ... I believe there could be, in a short time, a far more powerful organisation than anything of the kind known to modern times.

Beyond any question, the industrialists [i.e. supporters of industrial unionism as against craft unionism] of Australia are prepared to carefully consider any well thought-out proposals submitted to them by the comrades of Broken Hill and Port Pirie.

The time is particularly opportune also, because for some two years past much discussion has been indulged in as to the merits of industrial unionism, and the minds of many are prepared to co-operate in such effort as here set forth.

Many of the unions in New South Wales and Victoria have already given much attention to the subject, and are well disposed hitherto.

To remain in the present forcibly feeble condition characteristic of present-day unionism would be to stamp ourselves as incapables; and would admit of an indefinite prolongation of capitalist tyranny.

On all sides we see hysterical efforts being made by the plutocratic Governments of the different countries to prepare for war on an unprecedented scale, as a relief from glutted markets. Such is the condition of the peoples in Europe and America that deaths by starvation and deaths from diseases arising out of ill-nourished and unsanitary conditions are so appallingly large that the modern system stands condemned in the eyes of all intelligent citizens.

Through the ages men have died by millions before the naturally allotted span of life, because they have not been able to produce life’s requirements in the necessary abundance; but never before did the anomaly we now witness obtain, viz., that people die of hunger because they have produced so much as to glut the markets and fill the warehouses, and are then deprived of the opportunity to work, therefore of incomes. Hence, poverty, destitution, and misery.

These conditions cannot last. In spite of colossal ignorance, there is already too much intelligence and genuine courage to acquiesce in such class dominancy and exploitation as bring such results in its train.

Therefore, comrades, get to work like men of intelligence and courage, count it a privilege to be permitted to share in the great work of social and economic emancipation; for, indeed, there is no higher, no worthier, no holier work that can engage the energies of man.

Why you should believe the bourgeois media

A man of many pieces

By David McDonald

May saw the passing of Gil Scot Heron, a musician and activist whose talent and importance cannot be overstated. “The Godfather of Hip Hop” tag was one he shunned; besides being a cliché it also fails to do justice to a career of over 20 albums and an artist who refused to compromise.

Gil’s politics were unashamedly revolutionary. His songs spoke of the nature of exploitation and alienation with unparalleled eloquence. He also tried to paint a picture of an alternative to capitalism. Indeed his work of the 70s is like a blueprint for socialism, forming a major element of the Black Panther Party’s political orientation curriculum.

“I sail on in my paper ship, the sea is made of fire, I ride my horse of nuts and bolts, we’re made to never tire.” The opening line from “Or Down You’ll Fall” succinctly encapsulates the precarious tedium and alienation of waged labour, of living hand to mouth in monotonous drudgery. While, “A brand new sense of freedom, a brand new sense of time” reflects aspirations for a society beyond that drudgery where men and women relate to each other and their lives in a more spontaneous, productive manner.

His work defied categorisation, spanning griot-style spoken word, jazz, soul, reggae and blues. His ability to write a catchy pop tunes like “Lady Day and John Coltrane” or “The Bottle” meant he was coveted by major labels but never signed because of his reluctance to dilute the politics in his work.

Even the heady escapism of “Lady Day...” still emphasises the fact that people had something they needed to escape from, “Plastic people with plastic minds are on their way to plastic homes... until our hero rides in on his saxophone”. The infectious groove of “The Bottle” also carries a dark lyrical content about trying escape the reality of capitalist America.

Gil’s activism saw him play a key role in the campaign to have Martin Luther King’s birthday marked as a national holiday. He was also a vocal supporter of the international labour movement as was evident in works like “Blue Collar” and “3 Miles Down”.

The specific political commentary in his work covered the Watergate scandal (in “H20 Gate Blues”), the election of Reagan in “B Movie” and the decline of the civil rights movement in “Winter in America”. Songs like “Johannesburg” voiced his opposition for to the apartheid regime, while “Work for Peace” condemned the first invasion of Iraq in 1991.

Heron didn’t start hip hop and never claimed to but he did try to guide it. His 1992 track “Message to the Messengers” provided an open letter to rappers expressing his concerns about misogyny and gangsterism. It largely fell on deaf ears, as was evident in the “Ghetto Fabulous” mentality that took over, it did provide the basis for Talib Kweli’s 1995 “The Manifesto” which was a 10-point programme for conscious Hip Hop.

The lack of recognition and appreciation for Gil Scott Heron was highlighted by his recent imprisonment for cocaine possession. He struggled with addiction for decades, and his candid attitude about his weakness made him an easy target for the authorities.

The music press acclaim for his 2010 album, “I’m New Here” seems like praise out of obligation for overlooking him for the majority of his career. He produced work which was far more deserving of praise. But late praise is better than none at all. The world of music is a better place for his contribution and he should be sorely missed.

By Colin Foster

You shouldn’t, a lot of the time, of course. But a general approach of believing *nothing* in the bourgeois media is just as mind-rotting as credulity.

Bourgeois freedom of the press is not adequate, but it is something. We can read about Libya (for example) in a big range of bourgeois media, from the *Financial Times* through *Le Monde* and the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to *Al Jazeera*. They all have their own slants. Each can benefit from revealing something hushed up by another. None of them is controlled by a government.

Each of them has an immediate “market” interest in being known as reporting facts accurately. The capitalists themselves, and their large army of advisers, managers, and so on, need to know what’s going on. Some of them, on some things, commission private research, but most of them, on most issues, rely on the serious bourgeois press.

In the 1850s Karl Marx, with the help of Frederick Engels, made a living by writing reports on British and European affairs for a maverick bourgeois newspaper, the *New York Daily Tribune*. When he reported on the Crimean War, for example, he had no first-hand information. His reports to New York were based on reading a big range of bourgeois newspapers in Europe. He told his New York readers his sources for contentious assertions, and explained what bias or slant he expected from each paper.

He “believed what he read in the bourgeois media”, but read carefully, critically, and from a wide range of sources. His approach should be our model.

If not from the bourgeois media, where do we get our information on events beyond what we can see with our own eyes?

From the working-class media? In practice, the left press? Yes, sometimes, on industrial disputes blanked out by the bourgeois media. But on international politics, “high” domestic politics, and general social and economic trends, the left press, short of resources, has to rely for its basic information on the bourgeois media and other “bourgeois” sources, official statistics and so on. It “believes the bourgeois media”.

The left papers try to put the facts in context, and to highlight facts which get “lost in the crowd” in the bourgeois press. Essential work. Someone who reads a broad range of the left press, and critically, will get a reasonable picture of reality. Our material poverty means that even that person will be much better informed if she or he also reads the serious bourgeois press carefully.

Activists who take their information solely or mainly from a particular sector of the left press makes themselves utterly dependent on the slanting and selection of the papers they choose to read.

INFORMED

Imagine someone who read only the *Financial Times*, and someone who read only *Socialist Worker*. Which would be better informed about the world? Despite the general socialist intentions and attitudes of SW’s editors, the answer would be: the FT reader.

Relying on *Socialist Worker*, the reader would become captive to SW’s “agitationalism”, its propensity to take whatever snippets it can find in the bourgeois press which serve its current agitational line and inflate them to the exclusion of all else. And SW is far from the worst of the left press.

People who claim to have a line to world news bypassing the bourgeois media will in fact be dependent on one or another sector of the left press; or, ironically, on garbled snippets from the bourgeois press; or, worse, on Chinese-whispered recycling of stuff via the internet or word of mouth; or, even worse, on constructing a picture from their own prejudices.

“You can’t believe the bourgeois media”, was the rallying-cry of the majority in a recent debate in the London Transport Regional Council of the rail union RMT.

As Becky Crocker, one of the Workers’ Liberty Tube workers who were in the minority in that debate, put it afterwards, this amounted to saying: don’t believe information reflecting at least some knowledge of what’s going on, but instead believe whatever the speaker had made up, for example, that the anti-Qaddafi rebels in Libya are all “agents of the CIA and Al Qaeda”.

In the RMT council, political influences — ex-SWPers, and hangovers from the time when Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party was strong there — have weight. There is more to it.

Active trade unionists, used to seeing the capitalist media distort or blank out their industrial disputes, are sometimes

Theories about who was “really” responsible for 9/11 were made up by people who were unwilling to intelligently process the facts as presented in the bourgeois media.

predisposed to “never believe the bourgeois media”, or even to believe the opposite of what the bourgeois media say.

For decades that predisposition helped the Stalinists. The bourgeois media reported a mass of horrors in the USSR. Conclusion: the USSR must be good to attract that hostility. The USSR was good because the factual reports showed it to be bad.

As the disillusioned Susan Sontag put it in 1982: “Imagine, if you will, someone who read only the *Reader’s Digest* [at the tacky end of the right-wing bourgeois press spectrum] between 1950 and 1970, and someone in the same period who read only *The Nation* or *The New Statesman* [leftish liberal magazines]. Which reader would have been better informed about the realities of Communism [she meant: Stalinism]? The answer, I think, should give us pause. Can it be that our enemies were right?”

We should read everything critically — *starting with what we write ourselves*. If we read critically, we can get a lot of information from the serious bourgeois media.

The “don’t believe the bourgeois press” line is inevitably tied up with conspiracy theories. It depends on the idea that some agency of the bourgeoisie, the CIA or whatever, can control the whole bourgeois media behind the scenes, and meanwhile secretly supply the bourgeoisie with the true facts.

The “not believing” usually takes the form, not of flatly denying the main facts reported in the bourgeois media, but of claiming that those facts are shaped by an elaborately-hidden conspiracy. No-one thought that the bourgeois media reports of the bare facts of the 11 September 2001 plane hijackings were made up. Many people claimed that the hijackings were not organised by the people who said they’d organised them and had a long record of attempting similar things, but by secret agencies of the US government or “the Zionists”.

That way lies craziness and anti-semitism — and political helplessness. Secret bourgeois agencies so strong that they can engineer popular movements in Libya or other countries at will must be hard to defeat.

The “don’t believe the bourgeois media” and “conspiracy” mindset is a victim mindset rather than a revolutionary one.

The revolutionary socialist as democratic philosopher

Martin Thomas reviews *The Gramscian Moment*, by Peter Thomas, now available in paperback.

Antonio Gramsci was an Italian Marxist, a founding member of the Italian Communist Party in its revolutionary period of the 1920s, and chief leader of the CP from about 1923 to 1926.

Jailed by Mussolini’s fascist regime from 1926 until shortly before his death in 1937, Gramsci wrote *Prison Notebooks* which have gradually become, so Peter Thomas notes, “a classic of twentieth-century social theory”.

The *Notebooks* were first published in Italy in 1948-51, by an Italian Communist Party which by then was thoroughly Stalinist. It used them to back up its “national-popular” (reformist, class-collaborationist) strategy. The *Notebooks* were, after all, *notebooks*, not texts finished for publication. And, since Gramsci became very ill in prison, and often had to break off writing, they are mostly fragmentary.

That made them cryptic enough for the Communist Party to exploit them. From early on, dissidents criticised the Communist Party’s interpretation and argued that Gramsci should properly be read as a revolutionary working-class socialist who never abandoned his principles of the early 1920s.

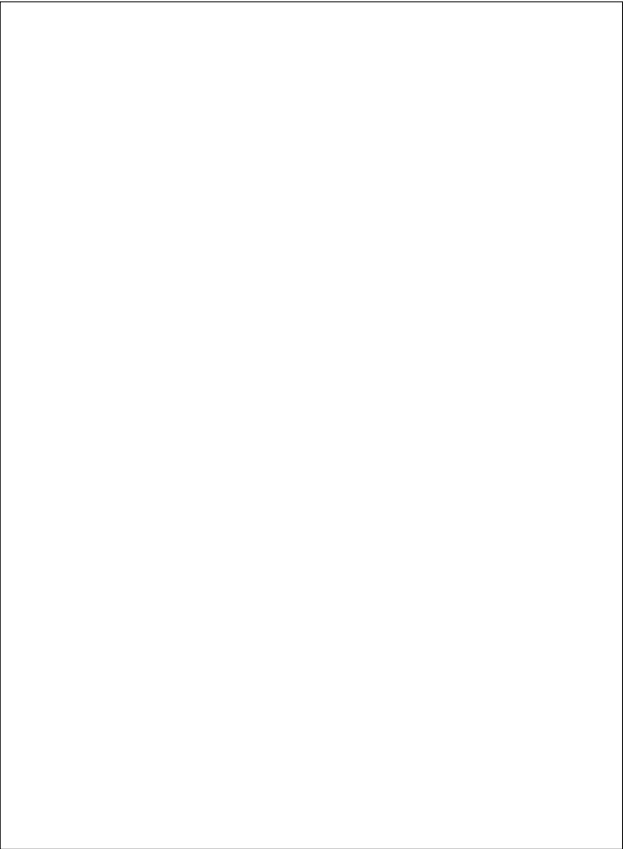
The influence of the *Notebooks* spread gradually. A selection was translated into English in 1971 (the *Further Selections*, published in 1995, and the complete translation being done by Joseph Buttigieg, are still difficult to obtain). Translations into French were published from 1978 onwards (with a compact volume of selections edited by André Tosel coming out in 1983); translations into German, from 1991.

Today, in Peter Thomas’s words, Gramsci’s *Notebooks* are “a significant point of reference in such diverse fields as history, sociology, anthropology, literary studies, international relations, and political theory”. In the universities, Gramsci is referred to more than any other Marxist writer, maybe even more than Marx himself. Students in any one of a wide range of courses of study will come across Gramsci even if they come across no other Marxist writer.

That is partly because there are now many more “Gramscis” than the old Communist Party “Gramsci” and the revolutionary Marxists’ “Gramsci”. A whole school of writers, mostly moving on from some background in or around the old Communist Parties, have made of Gramsci a bridge from socialist concerns to varieties of “post-Marxism” (in politics, varieties of liberalism), more or less imbued with post-modernism.

Gramsci’s best-known concept, “hegemony”, has been amputated from its basis in working-class politics, and turned into a puff-word for all manner of nondescript alliances.

Peter Thomas has written a book about Gramsci that both understands his thought as based in the great mass revolutionary socialist workers’ movement that flowered briefly between the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the triumph of Stalinism, and explores his originality. The book both covers well-trampled ground (hundreds of articles and books



Gramsci’s writing is now the subject of hundreds of academic discussions, articles and conferences every year across the world

about Gramsci now appear every year), and traverses it in a new direction (no other comprehensive book on Gramsci has approached the *Prison Notebooks* from the same angle).

It is well worth the effort of reading it. It is an effort. Though Peter Thomas can write well, on the whole the book bears the marks of its origins in a PhD thesis. When working on *Capital*, Marx wrote to Engels that he was “expanding” the book “since those German scoundrels estimate the value of a book in terms of its cubic capacity”. The PhD mill of today’s universities seems to estimate value in terms of volume of references and footnotes.

Thus the book starts not with Gramsci, but with a discussion of the old French Communist Party philosopher Louis Althusser and his criticism of Gramsci. Less respectful of Althusser than Peter Thomas is, I see this starting point as like trying to get a first overview of an inspiring building by crawling into it through its drains.

Moreover, even if one were more respectful of Althusser, his critique of Gramsci is only a few pages in his book *Reading Capital*, and in them “Gramsci” functions more as a straw man for Althusser’s own concerns than as a real figure.

Peter Thomas’s next approach is through a side-door: a discussion of Perry Anderson’s critical essay of 1976, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci*. Critique of Anderson is the headline feature of chapter two, and a major organising theme of much of the first half of the book.

The obliquity of approach is still unfortunate, but not because Anderson’s essay is of little worth. On the contrary: despite reading and re-reading Peter Thomas’s chapters, I am still not convinced that he has shown more than minor errors in Anderson’s essay. I have discussed this elsewhere (bit.ly/mAjK45).

“HEGEMONY” AND THE “UNITED FRONT”
From about chapter five, Peter Thomas gets into his stride.

He demystifies the concept of “hegemony” in Gramsci, from which so many speculations are spun, showing that it meant nothing other than working-class political leadership, achieved through sound use of united-front tactics.

He defines united front tactics as “the final strategic advice of Lenin to the Western working-class movement before his death”, “the only possible foundation for a realistic and responsible socialist politics” — and radically different from “the nationalist and non-class-based perspective of a ‘popular front’,” i.e. the sort of strategic alliance with bourgeois forces enforced by the Stalinist parties in the 1930s. He shows that Gramsci was won over to united-front tactics by Trotsky while Gramsci was in Russia in 1922-3, and further

that Gramsci’s views were deeply influenced by Lenin’s efforts, in his last years, under the New Economic Policy, to find a sound political basis, free of the abruptnesses of “war communism”, for an alliance between the Bolshevik leadership, the broader working class, and the USSR’s peasant majority.

Gramsci’s innovation, so Peter Thomas shows, was not the introduction of the concept “hegemony”, but his ideas about building what Gramsci calls a working-class “hegemonic apparatus”, which fights to win a working-class majority and working-class political power utilising the principles of the united front.

“A class’s hegemonic apparatus is the wide-ranging series of institutions and practices — from newspapers to educational organisations to political parties — by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political power”.

Where Gramsci discusses “consent” and “coercion” as aspects of leadership, his social-reformist interpreters have presented “consent” and “coercion” as mutually-exclusive alternatives. They have then argued that modern capitalist rule rests very largely on “consent” and claimed that therefore that all strategy must be directed at “consent”. They conclude that winning wide “consent” by a sort of diffuse cultural coalition-building is what “hegemony” really means.

Peter Thomas point out that for Gramsci, “leadership [or, what for him was pretty much a synonym] hegemony and domination are [only] strategically differentiated forms of a unitary political power”. For the workers’ party to win “consent” from the poorer classes is not an alternative to it mobilising class-struggle “coercion” against the wealthy classes. On the contrary: “A class’s ability... to secure the consent of allies... also relies upon its ability to coordinate domination over the opponents of this alliance”.

Or again: “Without an attempt to transform leadership in civil society into a political hegemony or into the nascent forms of a new political society, civil hegemony itself will be disaggregated and subordinated to... the existing political hegemony of the ruling class”..

He succinctly defines Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as “a Marxist theory of the constitution of the political”.

For Peter Thomas, the building-up by the working class of a “hegemonic apparatus” is its counterpoint to the organisation by the capitalist class of “the integral State”. He contends that “the concept of the integral State” is Gramsci’s real “novel contribution to Marxist political theory”.

“With this concept, Gramsci attempted to analyse the mutual interpenetration and reinforcement of ‘political society’ and ‘civil society’ (to be distinguished from each other methodologically, not organically) within a unified (and indivisible) State form. According to this concept, the State (in its integral form) was not to be limited to the machinery of government and legal institutions (the State understood in a limited sense). Rather, the concept of the integral State was intended as a dialectical unity of the moments of civil society and political society.

“Civil society is the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes. Such hegemony is guaranteed, however, ‘in the last instance’, by capture of the legal monopoly of violence embodied in the institutions of political society”.

“Eurocommunists” and “contemporary advocates of a nebulously defined radical democracy” fail to understand this when they “attempt to confine Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to a war of position in the trenches of civil society. It is only within the problematic of the integral State as a dialectical unity of both civil society and political society that Gramsci’s theory of proletarian hegemony becomes comprehensible, as a theory of the political constitution of an alliance of subaltern classes capable of exercising leadership over other subaltern social groups and repression against its class antagonist, necessarily progressing to the dismantling of the State machinery...”

Peter Thomas’s argument about “the integral State” is basic to his criticism of Anderson. But I think he tries to get too much service out of the word “dialectical”; and the airy phrase “dialectical unity” glosses over one of Anderson’s main points: that there is a specific form of interrelation of civil society and State in bourgeois democracy.

It is one which includes *boundaries* between the two — relative *separations* of politics and economics, and of public and private.

Continued on page 10

Workers’ Liberty London Forum

Gramsci, Trotsky and Marxism today

Speaker: Peter Thomas

Wednesday 29 June, 7.30pm

Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8QY

More: 07904 944771

Continued from page 9

Those relative separations of politics and economics, and of public and private, in bourgeois democracy, allows the working class to win what Trotsky described as “bases of proletarian democracy” within bourgeois society. If all institutions are lumped together into one “dialectical unity” of the “integral State”, then this built-in tension, the development of which is vital to working-class politics, is lost from sight, or at least shielded from sight.

It is odd that Gramsci, writing in a fascist jail, and lucidly hostile to Stalin’s “Third Period” rhetoric about fascism and social democracy being “twins”, did not explore the difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism in much detail; but he didn’t, and the “integral State” concept blurs that difference rather than elucidating it.

Peter Thomas takes up a phrase used (as he himself notes) only once by Gramsci, “the democratic philosopher”, and convincingly makes it the fulcrum of the later chapters of his book. Gramsci argued that *everyone* is a “philosopher”, the question only being how conscious and “coherent” the philosophy (the overview of the world and history) is. Peter Thomas discusses exactly what “coherent” means here.

He argues that Gramsci’s famous term “philosophy of praxis” is not just a euphemism which he used in his *Prison Notebooks*, for fear of censorship, in place of writing bluntly “Marxism”. Gramsci, he writes, offers a new conception of philosophy — “as a relationship of hegemony”; as a “conception of the world” developed in dialogue with the “senso comune” (roughly, common sense) of a definite social class.

The “democratic philosopher” is the purposeful, educating and self-educating, socialist activist. “The older ‘form’ of philosophy” is “superannuated” and must be “replaced by new practices of the socialist movement”.

This is, so to speak, a democratic and republican conception of philosophy rather than the absolute-monarch conception of earlier ages, or the constitutional-monarch conception which arises when scientific development has quelled some of the pretensions of speculation.

DEMOCRATIC PHILOSOPHER

Rather than having “philosophers” operating on a different plane from everyday people, who are left to the improvisations of “common sense”, or using the constraints of mass “common sense” to censor the “philosophers” (as the Catholic Church does), the “dialectical pedagogy” of “the democratic philosopher as collectivity” seeks, in Gramsci’s words, “to construct an intellectual-moral bloc that renders politically possible a mass intellectual progress and not only a progress of small intellectual groups”.

The “intellectuals” — of worker or of better-off background — must be “permanently active persuaders” in the mass movement, operating “in a reciprocal relationship of ‘democratic pedagogy’ in which those ‘intellectuals’... are at least as often ‘the educated’ as ‘the educators’.”

It is “a project of democratic expansion” — “or, as Gramsci wrote in the depths of [Stalin’s] Third Period [1928-34], ‘in politics of the masses, to say the truth is a political necessity, precisely’.”

In some passages of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci writes as if there is an absolute unity of theoretical understanding and practical activity — as if “philosophical” perception is impossible without being “an historic, political achievement of a [whole] *class*” engaged in actively changing the world.

“Unity of theory and practice” is often said to be a Marxian idea. But, as Peter Thomas points out, it is much older than Marx; and, as he does not point out, the phrase was nowhere used by Marx.

I do not know when the phrase was lifted from older writers (such as Hegel) and dropped into Marxist discourse.

George Lukacs used it a lot, but I doubt he was the first. It became a “conventional wisdom” with Stalinism.

The phrase “unity of theory and practice” is often interpreted as meaning such things as that practice should be guided by theory and theory should be translated into and tested by practice, which are indeed good sense; and so it has usually been accepted by anti-Stalinist Marxists.

But “unity of theory of practice” is a bad way of expressing that good sense. The necessary and proper linkage of theory and practice does not merge them into a single unity. They remain distinct. Practice will always be richer and more complex than theory; theory will always run ahead of practice, to some degree or another. Much theory has only a very distant relation to “practice” in the sense of political activity. *Disunity* of theory and practice — that is, scope for “provisional thinking”, autonomous from immediate practical imperatives — is necessary for intellectual progress.

As Theodor Adorno, refusing to knuckle under to Stalinism, wrote: “The call for a unity of theory and practice has increasingly demoted theory to the status of handmaiden... The practical identifying mark that was being demanded of all theory has also become a stamp of censorship... Theory... became a part of the very politics from which it was intended to find a way out”.

The catchcry “unity of theory and practice” has had malign effects in the anti-Stalinist left too. The idea that any theoretical dissent is idle chatter unless it can show quick practical conclusions has stifled thought; so has the habit of quickly shutting off any unfamiliar thought by “tagging” it with an uncongenial practical conclusion. (“If you say that the Stalinist states were worse for the working class than ordinary capitalism, then you end up backing US foreign policy” — that sort of argument).

Gramsci accepted the formula “unity of theory and practice”, and even sharpened it to “*identity* of theory and practice”. It is not clear, but it seems that he conceived of this identity as belonging to a “modern Prince”, a “hegemonic apparatus”, which “remained no more than a proposal for the future, not a concrete reality, in his time — or in our own” (Peter Thomas’s words).

What, then, can be done in actual time, Gramsci’s or our own? Gramsci, I think, and rightly, saw his “proposal for the future” as not something to be waited for, but something to be worked for, starting now. The sharpening of the formula “unity of theory and practice” to “identity of theory and practice” indicates that, even if you think it possible, it cannot be a precondition for action, but rather something to be worked towards.

“The most important observation to be made about any concrete analysis of the relations of force is the following: that such analyses cannot and must not be ends in themselves (unless the intention is merely to write a chapter of past history), but acquire significance only if they serve to justify a particular practical activity, or initiative of will. They reveal the points of least resistance, at which the force of will can be most fruitfully applied; they suggest immediate tactical operations; they indicate how a campaign of political agitation may best be launched, what language will best be understood by the masses, etc.

“The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact, and self-aware...”

“The protagonist of the new Prince could... only [be] the political party”.

The process of assembling and preparing the party starts long before it can become a decisive mass movement and,

by the richness of its theory and the power of its practice, come close to at least a metaphorical sort of “unity of theory and practice”. Gramsci analysed three elements required to form a party — mass membership, “principal cohesive element”, and intermediate cadres. He wrote of the second element, “numerically weak”, that it cannot “form the party alone”, but “it could do so” — i.e. make a start at forming a party — “more than could the first element”. And, by obvious implication, it should do so. It should assemble a nucleus even before a mass membership is possible; and without such a nucleus, developed in advance, mass membership alone cannot form a party.

Gramsci’s arguments point to starting the work of party-building now, even if only a small and primitive scale.

The question of the revolutionary working-class party is strangely marginalised in Peter Thomas’s book (there is not even an index entry for “party”). It is as if accepting the “identity of theory and practice” as the true shape of a “hegemonic apparatus” of the working class leads to concluding that when that full “identity” (or anything that could metaphorically be called that) is impossible, no lesser linkage of theory and practice is much worth bothering with.

Near the end of the book, he says of Gramsci: “His insights into the forms of a possible proletarian hegemony remain today their fertility for further theoretical and practical investigation, awaiting the energies and initiatives of a reviving working-class movement which alone will be able to confirm and, if necessary, to transform them in practice”.

Insights are not things that can “await”. Or is that the people who have the “insights” should “await”? Until they can be mobilised by “energies and initiatives of a reviving working-class movement”? In that scheme, instead of the “intellectuals” (of worker and other origin) providing “initiative”, it is the job of the generally relatively passive mass to do that...

ARRAY

Peter Thomas brings an array of talents to this book. He came into radical politics at the University of Queensland, in Australia, where he studied from 1992 to 2000. The first name mentioned in the acknowledgements in the book, and rightly so, is that of Dan O’Neill, his teacher in the English department at UQ, a veteran of the Brisbane left, and still active today after retirement from the university.

(Dan hosted and became the mainstay of the Gramsci reading group set up in Brisbane, on the initiative of Workers’ Liberty, from 2008, in response to the first draft of Peter Thomas’s book).

From Dan, I think we can say at a minimum, Peter Thomas got a scrupulousness about texts, a respect for the classics, a breadth of inquiry, and, in short, a fundamental opposition to all the shoddinesses of post-modernism.

Though never joining a Trotskyist group, Peter Thomas worked closely in campaigns and study groups with Trotskyists such as Murray Kane, Melissa White, and myself: he was surely, by the time he left Brisbane, a Trotskyist of some sort.

With remarkable energy, he got a series of grants enabling him to study in Berlin, in Naples, in Rome, and in Amsterdam. Much unlike the ordinary run of English-speaking academics, he writes with a fluent command of the literature, and a first-hand knowledge of the debates, in Italian and German as well as English.

I can’t help but think that there have been downsides in the transition from political activist to cosmopolitan academic. For example, the discussion of Anderson starts by accepting Fabio Frosini’s contention that Anderson’s work was “shown to be false by Gianni Francioni as early as 1984, and in Italy, among Gramsci scholars, has lost all credibility; no one today would dare to quote it”. It does not even mention as a relevant (though, of course, not decisive) consideration the fact that Anderson’s essay on Gramsci was written by an Anderson close to revolutionary Marxism, earnestly concerned to unravel his own earlier “Gramscian” reformism; while Francioni wrote from a standpoint in the orbit of the old Italian Communist Party.

The book is structured at odds with the dialogic conception of philosophy which it argues. Rather than engaging with the interactions, fruitful or botched, of the revolutionary Marxists with the “senso comune” (common sense) of the working class, it takes its markers from the debates in Marxist, post-Marxist, and Marxisant academia and within the old official Communist Parties, as if those constituted the universe of “Marxism”, in abstraction from political practice.

The book remains recognisably Trotskyist. Fabio Frosini, the commentator on Gramsci who gets by far the greatest number of favourable references in the book, testifies to this when, in a generally warm review of it, he comments disapprovingly that he finds its discussion of Gramsci’s affinity to Trotsky and hostility to Stalinism the least convincing element.

Despite all criticisms, this is a rich and valuable text, a source of many more ideas than can be mentioned in a short review.

• More on Gramsci, including an interview with Peter Thomas: www.workersliberty.org/gramsci

Representing sex workers

Dan Rawnsley went the London Sex Worker Film Festival (12 June) at the Rio Cinema, Dalston.

Introducing the day, Dr Heidi Hoefflinger, a sex worker activist and academic, argued that sex workers were “stigmatised as victims or criminals and rarely have their voices heard”. The day aimed to “shed some light on the complexity and diversity of sex work”. From what I saw the organisers were successful in their aim.

The blurb for the event rightly argued that films usually portray sex workers as either “vulnerable, fallen angels, without agency or power”, or “shallow, materialistic, manipulative and without ethics... if we are even alive to begin with — much of the time it doesn’t get past the dead hooker, killed violently by pimps, drug dealers or crazed punters.”

Several of the films I saw, most notably *Hands Off* by Winstan Whitter, which looks at strip clubs in Hackney, focused heavily on the fight for legalisation. This is an important campaign, but it portrays a struggle where sex workers and their bosses are united, in this case against local councils. Those sex industry bosses who are not interested in legalisation are mentioned in passing, and those who work for

them, amongst the most hyper-exploited in the industry, do not get a look in.

Though Thierry Schaffhauser, a sex worker organiser from the GMB, was interviewed the issues that workers faced outside of the fight for legalisation were not touched upon and throughout they were referred to as “the girls” without any effort by the interviewer or director to address the “belittling”.

The Street in Red dealt capably and powerfully with the violence faced by many sex workers which is completely overlooked by the police. *Ni Coupables, Ni Victimes* dealt with the issues of legalisation by interviewing sex workers and shop owners, but without dealing with the disparity between their aspirations and understandings of their struggle. The event was certainly significant — it was attended by around 400 people, and definitely an engaging and interesting experience.

I felt that there is a risk that the fight for legalisation — which for us is just a step towards organising sex workers to fight for control over their industry — currently dominates discussion in sex worker activism, potentially sidelining very immediate issues of pay and working conditions.

Tube drivers strike to reinstate Arwyn

By Darren Bedford

Drivers on London Underground, members of the RMT union, will strike on 19-20 June, 27-28 June, 29-30 June, and 1 July to win reinstatement for union activist Arwyn Thomas.

After two days of strike in late 2010, and an RMT decision to strike again in mid-May, Tube bosses backed down on another

victimisation, and reinstated Eamonn Lynch. After signalling that they would concede Arwyn Thomas’s case too, they have stonewalled on that, and so new strike decisions have been necessary.

Arwyn was sacked on trumped-up disciplinary charges following unproven allegations made against him by strike breakers. At his interim relief hearing, the Tribunal ruled that London Underground had

sacked him unfairly, unlawfully, and because of his trade union activities. It ordered LUL to pay Arwyn full wages until the tribunal procedures were complete.

In an unusual move, the Tribunal invited LU bosses to take a 15 minute adjournment and consider reinstating Arwyn straight away. The bosses said no.

Now they say that they “can’t see” why the RMT is striking before the Tribunal has published its final deci-

sion, which could be as late as September.

They have answered their own question. Even if the Tribunal rules that Arwyn should be reinstated, legally LU can refuse to do so. LU will reinstate him only under union pressure.

The RMT is right to apply that pressure now, rather than letting time make the issue fade and Arwyn’s exclusion from the workplace become a routine fact.

“Low-end” unis scrabble to survive

By a university worker

Posh universities will probably not be much hurt by the new £9,000 student tuition fees.

Enough people will take on enough debt to keep them flush.

But universities at the other end of the “market” face worse. London Met University has gone for lower fees and huge cuts in courses, so to “position” itself as a good cheap alternative for a limited range of courses.

Other low-end universities have made a less drastic, but risky, choice to charge high fees. Derby University is 29th of the 30 universities identified to be in serious financial risk by a Universities and Colleges Union survey. It advertises an average fee of £7,400 (standard: £6,995; resource-

intensive: £7,495; specialist: £7,995; premium: £9,000).

Elsewhere, Birmingham and Nottingham universities have started a project to merge their back-offices, and I think that move is intended to provide the framework for take-overs of (parts of) other universities in the region.

Derby University’s deans and heads of schools have been travelling hard in recent months, chasing deals in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, or even Libya!

University bosses intend to set up a separate online business with staff on separate contracts, yet to be negotiated.

A lot of this is a desperate search for an El Dorado, pushed with no understanding that effective online learning is actually more costly in terms of tutor support than face-to-face education.

Justice for Clara!

By a Tube worker

On 26 May, London Underground cleaners’ rep Clara Osagiede beat back Initial Cleaning Services’ attempt to victimise her for enforcing standards of safety for cleaners at her workplace, her role as a health and safety rep.

She stood up to management when a group of cleaners were removing graffiti from trains without appropriate equipment or training. A few days later, she was suspended from work.

She went into her disciplinary hearing facing a se-

ries of invented or exaggerated charges. She argued that it would be unfair for the disciplinary to proceed while she had a number of grievances against the company which had never been dealt with. Many of these charges would not have reached a disciplinary if the company had dealt with them in the appropriate way. Management agreed to suspend the disciplinary until the grievances are heard.

This is a temporary stay of execution. We need to keep up the pressure to make sure Initial do not go on to discipline her.

second strike after negotiations collapsed during a meeting with the management on 9 June. The university had failed to rectify the damaging proposals to end the final salary scheme for the workers, who would instead receive “an inferior cash balance scheme”.

We must push for action over the summer term to make sure the campaign sustains its momentum.

London postal strikes in limbo

By Stewart Ward

Planned strikes by London postal workers are in limbo as of 13 June, with the postal workers’ union CWU still closeted in talks with Royal Mail bosses.

On 23 May the CWU announced that 79% of members voting from workplaces in London facing total or partial closure had backed strikes.

Royal Mail wants to close Twelvetreelane Lane mail centre in East London and Nine Elms mail centre in South West London, sharply scale down the big Mount Pleasant centre in Islington, and close the Rathbone Place delivery office just off Oxford Street.

All the closures are due to go through this year. Some work was to be moved from Nine Elms already. That move has been put on hold while the talks

proceed.

However, all signs are that the talks are about the details of the closures, rather than the closures themselves. CWU has effectively accepted closures and job cuts, and reduced its demand to one for no compulsory redundancies.

Royal Mail could “meet” that demand, at least in part, by offering workers redeployment to impossibly distant sites.

These closures are so big, however, that some compulsory redundancies seem almost certain. Action to stop them will be necessary; and the quicker the better, rather than letting the members’ determination, expressed in the 79% majority, dissolve into confusion and disillusion.

CWU emphasises that these closures will mean further deterioration of a postal service already strained by previous cuts.

Southampton workers “upbeat”

By Kieran Miles

Over one hundred refuse collectors are on a two-week long strike in Southampton, which will end on 22 June.

Street cleaners are on a one-week long strike, which started on 13 June. At the same time, traffic wardens have been refusing to collect parking fines — at a cost to the council of £100,000. 150 social workers are currently on a work to rule, and on the 13th, Itchen Bridge workers refused to collect tolls. Hospital cleaners from Southampton General, working for the contractor Medirest, were also striking.

Unite and Unison overlapped actions from the five groups to coincide on 13 June, when a big demonstration in support of striking workers was organised. The unions estimated that a thousand people attended the demo.

The strikes came in response to the Conservative Council’s proposed pay

cuts. 4,300 employees received dismissal notices, telling them to accept new contracts with include pay cuts of up to 5.5%, or else be sacked on 11 July. Andy Straker of Unison said: “It really is appalling that in this day and age, a local authority can seek to intimidate a workforce out of their terms and conditions... this is what a Tory leadership means — those who can least afford to, suffer most.”

Mike Tucker of Southampton Unison praised the “upbeat” nature of the demonstration, but warned that if talks with ACAS and the Council on Thursday 16 June failed to renegotiate the contracts, then Unison would “ballot for further strikes”.

Unison conference: action good, democracy vital

By a Unison member

Dave Prentis, general secretary of the big public sector union Unison has announced plans to ballot the union’s members for strikes against the government’s pension cuts.

Prentis first made that declaration on May Day, and has now repeated it in the run-up to Unison’s local government and general conferences, to be held in Brighton on 19-24 June.

“Be in no doubt”, said Prentis, “this union is on the road to industrial action in the autumn”. He added that this will “not be a one-day action, as we know that will not change anything. This is longer term industrial action to prevent the destruction of public service pension schemes”.

This shift by Prentis may win him an easy ride at the conference, especially as the left in Unison has generally not pushed hard to get the union into action sooner, alongside the teachers and civil service workers on 30 June. It shouldn’t.

On 30 June, many Unison members, especially in schools, where they work alongside teachers, will refuse individually to cross picket lines. But, lacking support for their union, Unison members in many other workplaces will walk through picket lines on their way to work.

They will weaken the strikes and it will give non-union members the courage to cross picket lines.

Unison’s leaders defend their stance on 30 June by saying they need more time to “cleanse” their membership records so their ballot does not fall foul of the anti-union laws (the same Tory anti-union laws which Dave Prentis completely failed to push the New Labour government to repeal over 18 years in government).

That doesn’t explain why they have not had “enough time” already, in the year and more since the coalition Government made its plans for pension cuts and other cuts clear soon after the General Election. Does Unison really operate on the basis that, faced with a big attack, it will take well over a year for it to get ready to fight back?

In any case, there is no way that Unison will be able to give up-to-date contact information for over one million members without making some mistakes. The crucial question will not be whether the bosses will find mistakes, but whether they think they

can get away with a legal challenge without provoking unofficial action.

That depends on members’ confidence and militancy. And that in turn depends on good information and strong leadership. Unison members are not getting that.

Outside the future action which Dave Prentis vaguely invokes, the Unison leaders have worked to hold back strike action against the cuts which have already taken tens of thousands of Unison members’ jobs in local government.

When Tower Hamlets struck on 30 March, the union did not publicise it. In the run-up to Unison conference, the leadership has adopted a more militant stance, telling the world (8 June) that “the union [is] balloting 30,000 members in branches across the country over industrial action to protect pay and conditions and against job losses”. It has given some publicity to the Southampton council workers’ dispute.

But many activists have had to spend months battling with their regional officers to get strike ballots. Some unelected regional officers have blocked ballots on job cuts on the basis that those are not “real trade disputes”.

Unison consistently fails even to act as an adequate clearing-house for exchanging information between its vast number of different branches, and actively, by union rule, bans branches from communicating “horizontally” between themselves.

Our approach must be to fight for union democracy, and to use the democratic structures of the union to seek maximum rank-and-file control over disputes. That means raising specific demands around which we mobilise for our strikes. These demands will arm our negotiators and allow us to hold them to account.

We want rank-and-file control over industrial strategy. This means imposing negotiating timetables on the leadership so they cannot disappear into the negotiating room for months on end. It means demanding regular reports of negotiations, demanding that the negotiations are open and available for all members to scrutinise.

We believe in a trade unionism where every member has something to contribute. We are not a standing army waiting for orders from our union leaders.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Health: Tories still going for market rule

55 vulnerable adults abused every day

Leaked data from the NHS Information Centre reveals that from October 2009 to March 2010, social care departments received 40,000 formal complaints about abuse of vulnerable adults. (*Financial Times*, 13 June)

More than 8,600 claims were substantiated, in a survey covering 80% of councils. So probably 10,000-plus vulnerable adults have been abused over a six month period — that's 55 adults a day.

A quarter of the claims involved adults with learning disabilities, and another quarter people aged 85 or over.

A third of all claims involved physical abuse, and others psychological abuse, misuse of medication, financial abuse (such as pressure to change wills and theft) and sexual abuse.

One-third of complaints took place in a care home. 25% of complaints were made about unqualified care workers, at a time when social care, already chronically under-funded, is facing a fresh wave of cuts. Many universities and further education colleges are closing their Social and Health Care courses.

Gary Fitzgerald, chief executive of Action on Elder Abuse, criticised the coalition's "retrograde step" of scrapping plans to regulate care workers.

• Southern Cross crisis, page 3.

Coalition pushes “work for your dole”

By Matt Thompson

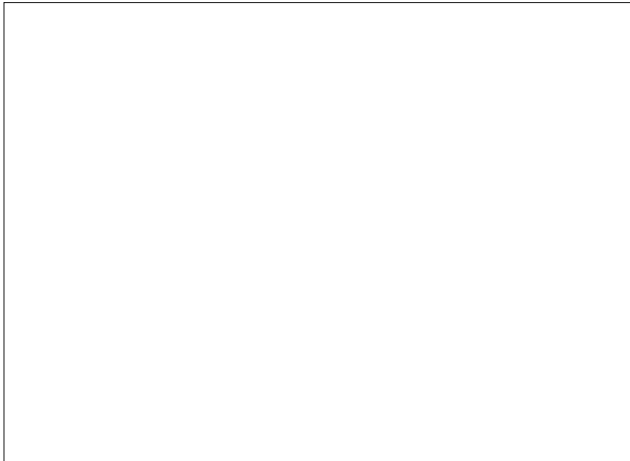
The Department for Work and Pensions estimate that the companies awarded Work Programme contracts under the Government's new “work-for-dole” plan, will make a ten per cent profit, based on them reaching targets for finding people jobs.

Leaving aside the principle of private companies profiteering here, previous experience indicates that the companies are likely to concentrate on those easier to find jobs for, the newly unemployed and skilled, rather than longer term claimants with mental health, literacy or addiction problems. They will fiddle the figures by, for example, multiple job placements for one “client”.

The Work Programme is modelled on US-style workfare schemes where there are also stringent sanctions for non-compliance and “partnerships” with sweatshop employers eager to offer “work placements” to an endlessly rotating group of claimants.

As well as opposing these schemes alongside claimants organisations, trade unions should be in the forefront of actively organising against them.

The Work Programme is in many respects a continuation of the “welfare reform” process initiated by New Labour. Where the last government operated an array of “work for your



Protest outside ATOS offices — ATOS run the medical assessments for Employment and Support Allowance

dole” schemes for the unemployed, sick and disabled, Work Programme essentially merges them into one.

Many of the companies bidding for Work Programme contracts — A4E, G4S, Serco — also made large profits from running New Labour schemes like the New Deal. The New Deal, like the planned Work Programme, also included mandatory “work placements” of up to 26 weeks where claimants were forced to work for their benefit and were sanctioned if they didn't.

Unlike the New Deal, the Mandatory Work Activity in the Work Programme can be invoked from day one of a claim.

Employers who have apparently expressed an interest in exploiting this new pool of free labour include Primark and Poundland.

Another continuity with

New Labour is the attempt to include sick and disabled claimants in “work-focused activity”. Labour scrapped Incapacity Benefit for new claimants, replacing it with the tougher to claim Employment and Support Allowance, and signalled its intention to extend ESA to all IB claimants, which the Tory-Lib Dem coalition is now in the process of doing.

There is already evidence from that those who fail the medical for ESA and are forced to swap to Jobseekers Allowance — in particular people with mental health problems — are being disproportionately sanctioned for failing to comply with JSA conditions.

• The Boycott Workfare coalition takes direct action against those organisations which accept Work Programme placements. See: www.boycottworkfare.org

By Kieran Miles

On 13 June NHS Future Forum, the body overseeing the government's “listening exercise” on health service reforms reported and recommended changes to the government Bill.

Most of the recommended changes are cosmetic.

The Forum recommends that Public Health England (the body which will give advice to the new GP consortia, and to the government) should be an independent body, taken out of government control, and that all organisations involved in NHS care or the use of NHS funds should be “subject to ... high standards of public openness and accountability”.

The timescale of the changes should be altered and the previous deadline of 2013 extended where necessary.

The Secretary of State for Health should still be ultimately accountable for the NHS.

There should be better integration between different NHS bodies.

The report strongly urges the government to allow other health workers, such as nurses, specialist doctors and other clinicians to be part of the decision making.

It says that Monitor (the Independent Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts), should not enforce competition within the NHS, and should only promote it in order to “improve quality, promote integration and increase citizens' rights”

The report said it did not want private companies to “cherry pick” NHS services, but also that competition, if “properly regulated”, would not threaten “the fundamental principle of an NHS that is universal and free at point of delivery”. Privatisation

stays.

There were also no suggested guidelines for defining what “good quality” is; presumably it relates to efficiency, rather than waiting times, quality of care, and survival rates.

So much for this listening exercise.

Dr David Price, of Barts & London School of Medicine and Dentistry, told *Solidarity* that he found a striking similarity between the “Future Forum language [and] the language of a Department of Health briefing”, suggesting that the document may actually “have been written by the Department”.

On the day after the report was released, David Cameron announced his acceptance of certain parts of the recommendations, specifically parts relating to accountability.

There are also plans to replace GP consortia with “clinical commissioning groups”. These will not cross any local authority boundaries. David Price believes this should be welcomed. The consortia had previously been criticised for not having geographic responsibilities to all patients (allowing consortia to “cherry pick” their patients and services).

However, ministers a week ago were not minded to make that change, and until such plans are fleshed out, they should be regarded with a degree of suspicion.

Cameron insists that the NHS will not be privatised. But, with the levels of market competition still included in NHS plans, his claims remain completely false.

We need to step up the campaign to defend the National Health Service.

Don't deport Betty Tibakawaa!

By Michelle Kennedy

Betty Tibakawa is a young lesbian from Uganda who fled to the UK, because in her own country she was violently attacked because of her sexuality.

Three men abducted her, kicked her in the stomach, and branded her inner thighs with hot irons. Her injuries were so severe she could not leave her home for two months.

The UK immigration system wants to send her back to Uganda where

they say she is “not at risk of harm”.

Uganda has some of the most repressive anti-LGBT laws in the world. Huge international pressure only just managed to adjourn a law that would have made homosexuality (currently incurring a fourteen year prison sentence) a crime warranting the death sentence.

The bill would also have given the government power to extradite people engaged in sexual acts with the same sex whilst abroad, given penalties to any companies, media

outlets or NGOs which supported LGBT rights, and given the death penalty to anyone who was HIV-positive.

David Kato, a teacher and prominent LGBT rights activist in Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), was recently murdered after an article by Ugandan tabloid *Rolling Stone* called on people to murder homosexuals, and named and photographed Kato, amongst 100 others. In February 2011, the magazine *Red Pepper* published a similar article, which

outed Betty as a lesbian. Her name and photograph have been made public, and her family have disowned her.

Despite the clear evidence that Betty would face severe terror, injury, imprisonment or death if she returned to Uganda, she is now in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre facing deportation.

The UK Border Agency claims that Betty has fabricated her lesbianism, and dispute whether the injuries she suffered were caused because of homophobia, despite their find-

Ugandan magazine *Red Pepper* outs lesbian and gay people

ings having clearly ruled out the possibility of self-harm.

Betty said of her situation: “I look at a community like in Central London, I see so many of them. I see gay guys. They walk in the street, they hold hands, and they kiss at the bus stops and on the bus. You know, it's free, so it's not hard for me to tell them I'm a lesbian. But in Uganda, I can't say that. I really can't. I don't even

know how to. I just can't. I just can't. I can't.

“I don't want to live, not being able to live as me. I don't wanna be someone else just because of the situation around me. I just want to live truly, and just live like me. That's really what I want.”

• To sign the petition to prevent the deportation of Betty Tibakawa, please visit: bit.ly/jRf0bZ